

Try traditional early American fried squirrel

By Rev. J.D. Hooker

If you really want to, you can take a whole lot of shortcuts with this recipe. It would probably still taste just as great. However, you really would miss most of the enjoyment, and couldn't possibly find the meal nearly as satisfying. I hope that you'll just take my word on this, because if you skimp on the preliminaries, you'd probably enjoy eating at one of those fast food chicken places just as much.

Ingredients:

1 energetic youngster
 1 .410 shotgun with shells
 1 adult
 1 squirrel rifle (a .22 rimfire is fine, but a .30 or .32 muzzle loader is more traditional.)
 1 squirrel call
 1 one-or-two-foot section of ½" plastic pipe
 1 pocket-full of small stones
 1 small carry-along cooler with ice
 5 fox squirrels, or 6 gray squirrels
 2½ cups of white flour
 1¼ cups of cornmeal
 3 large (or 4 medium) eggs
 2¼ cups milk
 1½ tsp. baking powder
 1 tsp. salt
 ½ tsp. black pepper
 1½ cups beef tallow
 ½ cup applejack whiskey (if unavailable, either bourbon or sour-mash whiskey will do)

Preparation time: Approximately 12 hours

Instructions:

To begin with, you'll probably need to get out of bed an hour or two earlier than usual, because you'll want to be out in the woods right about daybreak, or even a trifle before.

Let the kid use the .410, while you handle the rifle.

You know, there are quite a lot of people who might argue that a shotgun is really an unsportsmanlike weapon for hunting squirrels. If you happen to be one of those people, all I can say is that you need to try collecting a limit of squirrels with a diminutive little .410 bore yourself. It really requires considerably more skill than most folks would

imagine. Really, this tiny gauge is more of a specialist's weapon, with its tiny shot charge and limited range. That is undoubtedly the reason it's been recommended for teaching youngsters to hunt for so many years: it actually forces them to acquire a much higher level of skill than another firearm would. In fact, I've found that I'm not the only squirrel hunter around here who likes to use adapter shells. These allow the use of 2½" .410 shells in my side-by-side 12 bore.

Here in Indiana, the season on squirrels opens in mid-August, when (normally) it's not just warm, but downright hot. So—at least early in the season—a small cooler filled with ice is a real necessity. Without it, your hunting efforts can all too easily be turned into wasted time, as the game you collect spoils at an accelerated rate in such temperatures.

Take turns with the youngster, one of you staying prepared to shoot, as the other attempts to call your quarry into range. Here's where that section of water pipe comes into use. Use it sort of blow-gun fashion, shooting the small stones into the air, so that they'll rustle a lot of tree leaves in their descent. If you'll alternate between using the pipe and using the squirrel call, you'll soon have every bushy tail within hearing range convinced that one of their kindred has stumbled on to a feeding bonanza. They'll think they hear him happily barking away, as the husks and shells from the nuts he's feasting on fall from the tree top.

During hot weather, it pays to clean each squirrel as it's taken. Add the meat to the cooler before moving on to another part of the woods to begin calling again.

You might want to think about letting the kid save the tails from the squirrels you collect, because Meps, the fishing tackle people (who probably made some of the best lures in your tackle box) will still buy them. They don't pay a whole lot, and I doubt if you could ever make any real

money at this—but if neither of you miss too often, selling the tails should pretty well pay for your ammo. And that's not a bad lesson for a kid to learn, either.

Once you're home again, with your firearms cleaned and put away, clean the meat more thoroughly, picking off any bits of hair, etc., and removing any pellets from the .410. Rinse the meat under cold water, then cut it into frying sized pieces. Refrigerate until time to prepare dinner.

Preparation:

Place the meat in a pot, and cover with lightly salted water. Bring to a rolling boil, then reduce heat and simmer until tender. When the meat is tender, add the applejack (or whiskey) and simmer about five more minutes.

While the meat is simmering, mix together the flour, corn-meal, baking powder, salt, and pepper. You can just dump all of these dry ingredients into a paper sack, fold the end closed, and shake real well to mix.

Once the meat is tender, remove from the heat and use a slotted spoon to dip the pieces of meat from the liquid. Set the meat aside to cool slightly.

As the meat cools, mix the eggs and milk together; use a fork for very thorough mixing. Then melt the tallow in a heavy skillet. (You can substitute any sort of shortening you like, but at least once try using the tallow—you'll love the extra flavor!)

Once it's cooled enough to touch, dip each piece of meat into the milk-egg mixture, then dredge in the flour mixture. Fry a few pieces at a time over moderately high heat, turning once, until golden brown. Drain on paper towels.

Add enough of any remaining milk mixture to what's left of the flour mixture to form a very stiff dough. If you have

to, add just a little more milk to form the dough. Bring the broth remaining from simmering the squirrel to a boil again. Drop the dough, by tablespoonfuls, into the boiling liquid. Cook for about fifteen minutes, and serve these boiled hush-puppies with the fried squirrel.

If you can add some fresh sweet corn, cooked on the cob, maybe a salad of fresh garden produce, and some ice cold sweet cider, you'll have a traditional American feast, one that's actually *too good* to serve to a king. (But if you can get any of your liberal friends to come to dinner, you might just be able to change their whole outlook on firearms and hunting. Fried squirrel suppers are highly addictive, after all!)

Hopefully you'll have included the youngster who helped to collect the meat for the meal in its preparation as well. Maybe you ought to let him, or her, be the one to ask the blessing before you enjoy it as well. I mean, they've earned the right, by this point, to enjoy the adult-sized privilege/right of expressing gratitude to their Creator.

And hopefully you'll also do your part in cleaning up after dinner, just to show your own good upbringing.

For dinner conversation, you might want to make certain that the youngster you've spent the day with really understands the true traditions of American squirrel hunting. Especially the part about how a bunch of early American farmers, craftsmen, clergymen, and shop owners, with their aim honed by years of squirrel shooting, took on the most powerful military force on earth, and drove the British army into the sea!

Anyway, this is absolutely the very finest fried squirrel recipe that I've ever tasted. If you'll prepare it exactly according to the directions, I'm positive that you'll agree. Δ

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